

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Twin Falls District
Burley Field Office
15 East 200 South
Burley, Idaho 83301

**Categorical Exclusion Documentation Format When Using Categorical Exclusions Not
Established by Statute**

NEPA No. ID-220-2008-443

A. Background

BLM Office: Burley Field Office. Lease/Serial/Case File No.: IDI-36289

Proposed Action Title/Type: Raft River Valley Geothermal Exploration.

Location of Proposed Action: Boise Meridian, T. 15 S., R. 27 E., Sec. 8, 9, 17, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35.

Description of Proposed Action: The proposed action is to conduct a gravity survey using a gravity meter that is momentarily placed on top of a base plate on top of the ground at 250-meter intervals. Once a value is recorded, the meter and base plate are picked up and taken to the next site where the process is repeated. Sites will be accessed overland via all-terrain vehicles (ATV's), such as a Honda 350. Sites will be visited one time and will generally not need to be re-visited. The locations for each measurement form a 250 meter interval grid that covers at least part of each of the above-listed sections.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: Cassia Resource Management Plan (RMP). Date Approved/Amended: January 24, 1985.

X The proposed action is in conformance with the applicable LUP because it is specifically provided for in the following LUP decision(s): As addressed in A. Energy Resources on p. 32 of the Cassia RMP, this area is "Open to leasing subject to the following stipulation: Protect ferruginous hawks between March 1 and July 15 by prohibiting activity within the shorter of the following two distances – 2,000 feet or the visible range of active nest sites. No exploration/development work in sage grouse strutting/brood-rearing habitat from April 1 through June 15." Also, as addressed under F. Motorized Vehicle Management on p. 32 of the Cassia RMP, this area is "Open to all vehicles."

C. Compliance with NEPA:

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, B. Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Energy (6): "Approval of Notices of Intent to conduct geophysical exploration of oil, gas or geothermal, pursuant to 43 CFR 3150 or 3250, when no temporary or new road construction is proposed." The proposed action fits this category because it is a geophysical exploration of geothermal energy using a device that records changes in gravity values resulting

from density differences in subsurface geologic formations. Travel will be overland using ATV's and will not require temporary or new road construction.

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2 apply. In making my determination that none of the extraordinary circumstances apply, I considered the following information:

1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because the proposed action would have no impacts on public health or safety. The proposed action only involves driving ATV's over one-time, cross-country routes through the gridded sites with only momentary stops at each site to record the gravity values read by the gravimeter.
2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because there are no historic or cultural resources, parks, recreation or refuge lands, wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, national natural landmarks, sole or principal drinking water aquifers, prime farmlands, wetlands floodplains, national monuments or other significant or critical areas either located within the project area that will be impacted by this project.
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2) (E)].
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because the proposed activity will involve only temporary and minimal, if any, disturbance to vegetation and soil. The effects are not highly controversial and do not involve any unresolved conflicts. As the project area is already open to OHV travel, the project would pose no more disturbance than what is already allowed by the Cassia Resource Management Plan (RMP).
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because there will be minimal to no impact to the environment for the duration of this project. There are no unique or unknown environmental risks posed by the proposed action.
5. Establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because approving the proposed action does not set a precedent. The applicants, operators, and contractors, when signing the Notice of Intent to Conduct Geothermal Resource Exploration Operations that describes the

proposed activity, agree that the filing of said Notice under the regulations (43 CFR Subpart 3250) does not vest or confer any preference right to a geothermal resources lease.

6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because the proposed action does not have a direct relationship to other actions. The proposed action is not connected to other like actions and poses no more impact than that of ATV's which are already allowed in the project area.
7. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because based on a review of the project by the BLM Archaeologist, there are no known significant Cultural Resources located in the project area, and the project will have no measureable ground disturbance. No field survey was conducted as outlined in "Exempt Undertakings" of the State Protocol Agreement (SPA; Appendix C #22).

If there are any future or inadvertent historic or cultural or paleontological property discoveries made during project implementation, there will be an immediate cessation of project activities and the Burley Field Manager and Archaeologist will be contacted for further investigation (see also 36 CFR 800.11 and SPA). In the event that American Indian human remains, unassociated funerary objects, or grave goods are encountered, work in the immediate vicinity of the discovery will cease, and BLM shall comply with NAGPRA as outlined in 43 CFR 10 by consulting with the SHPO and implementing appropriate mitigation.

8. Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species.
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because conducting a gravity survey using ATV's would pose only minimal, short-term disturbance to threatened, endangered or BLM sensitive species. Although relevant data (BLM files and the Idaho State Fish and Game CDC database) indicates that several BLM sensitive species are known to occur in the project area (little pocket mice, pygmy rabbits, sage grouse, loggerhead shrike, sage and brewer's sparrows), the use of ATV's in the proposed action would pose only minimal, short-term disturbance. The project area is designated as open to ATV's so this type of activity could already occur.

The proposed action would not special status plant species because there are no known occurrences of threatened, endangered, or sensitive plants in the project area. This project may involve some crushed vegetation and minor soil disturbance but because of the short duration of time spent at each site and during travel to each site, the impacts will be minimal and temporary.

9. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because the proposed action would not violate any laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. There are migratory birds and sage grouse present in the project area. The proposed action is expected to occur in late summer and/or fall 2008 outside the nesting/breeding season. If the survey is not completed as planned, no ATV use is approved for the period March 1 to June 30 unless a nest survey is approved or coordinated with a BLM biologist.
10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).
Rationale: This extraordinary circumstance does not apply because there would be no disproportionately high or adverse effect on any low income or minority population. The short duration and minimal disturbance to vegetation from this project would not have any high or adverse effects on any population.
11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).
Rationale: The project will be of a transient nature and will not limit any access to the project area.
12. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).
Rationale: The Applicant or applicant-designated contractors will be required to wash the undercarriage of their ATV's to ensure the ATV is free of any plant or soil material prior to conducting the gravity survey. As there will be minimal to no ground disturbance during the short period of time in which this survey takes place, the introduction or spread of non-native or noxious weeds is not likely and no more likely than what OHV recreation would pose.

I considered the timing of this proposed action (late summer/fall 2008) and the cultural resource, special status plant, and sensitive animal clearances provided by our archeologist and wildlife biologists. I have found that there is no potential for significant impacts if the terms and conditions of the Notice filed and the following restrictions are observed:

1. Avoid driving ATV's overland in wet conditions to prevent excessive tracks/ruts on the surface.
2. Exploration using ATV's should not occur from March 1 to June 30 to avoid harming nesting sage grouse or migratory birds unless a nest survey is approved or coordinated with a BLM biologist.
3. Avoid driving over burrows when possible.
4. The undercarriage of the ATV's will be washed prior to beginning work in the project area to minimize any potential transfer of noxious weed seeds or plants.

5. Should any future or inadvertent historic, cultural or paleontological property discoveries, or American Indian human remains, unassociated funerary objects, or grave goods be encountered during project implementation, project activities will immediately cease and the Burley Field Manager will be notified to coordinate further investigation.

D. Signature

Authorizing Official: /s/ Michael Courtney Date: 9/4/08

Name: Michael Courtney

Title: Burley Field Manager

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this Categorical Exclusion, contact Valerie Lenhartzen, Geologist, at the address listed above, by telephone at (208) 677-6667, or by e-mail Valerie_Lenhartzen@blm.